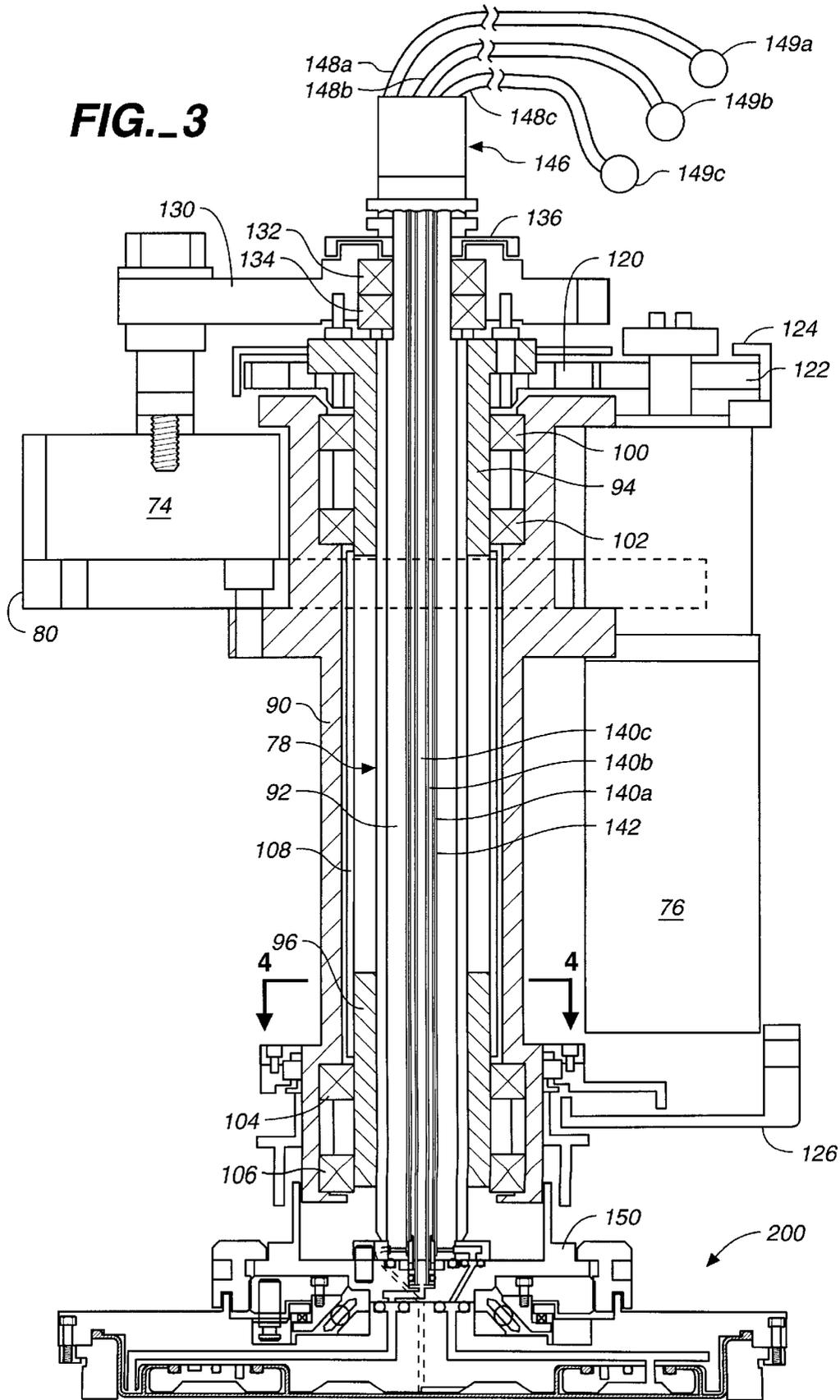


FIG. 2B

FIG. 3



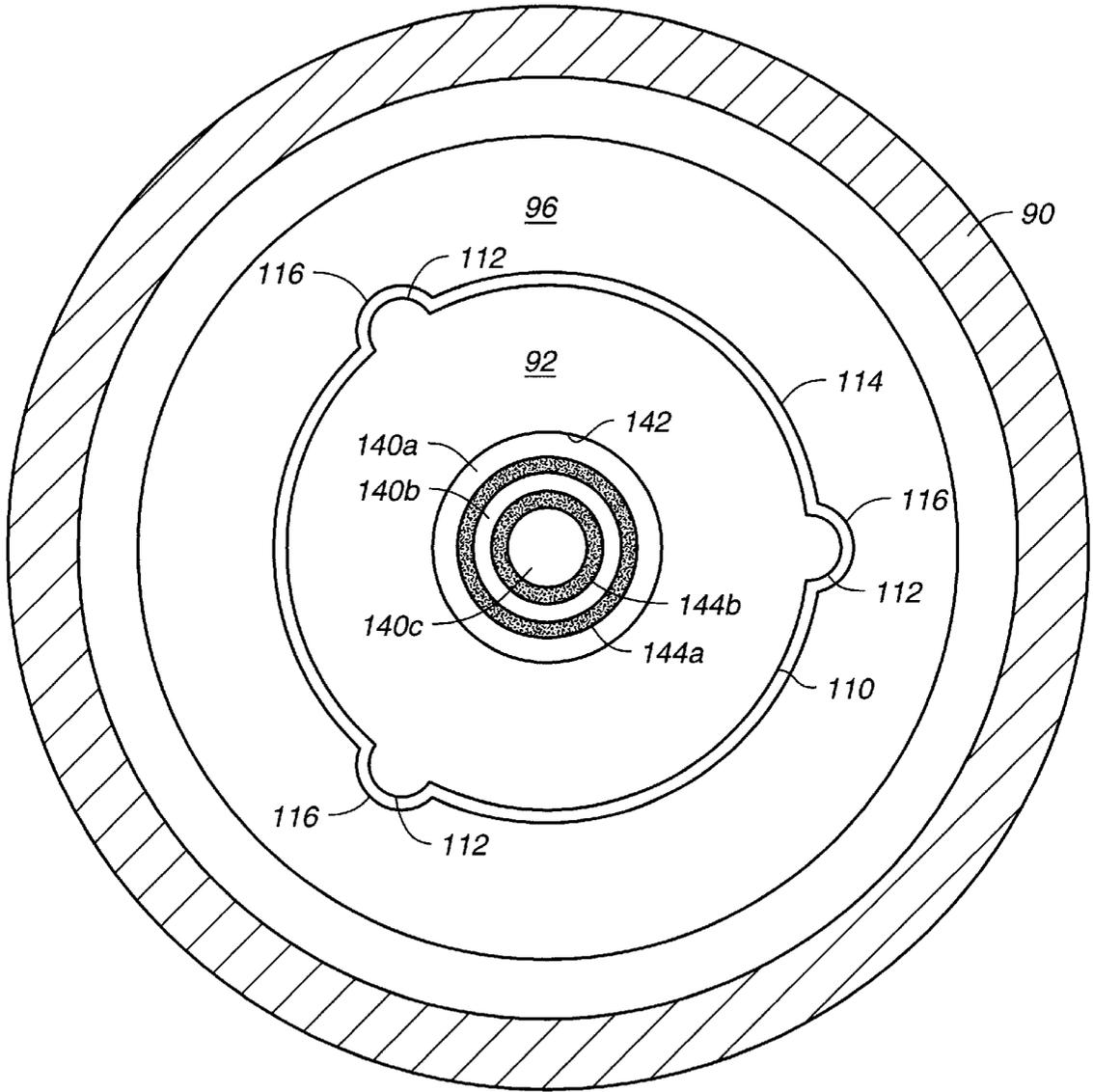


FIG. 4

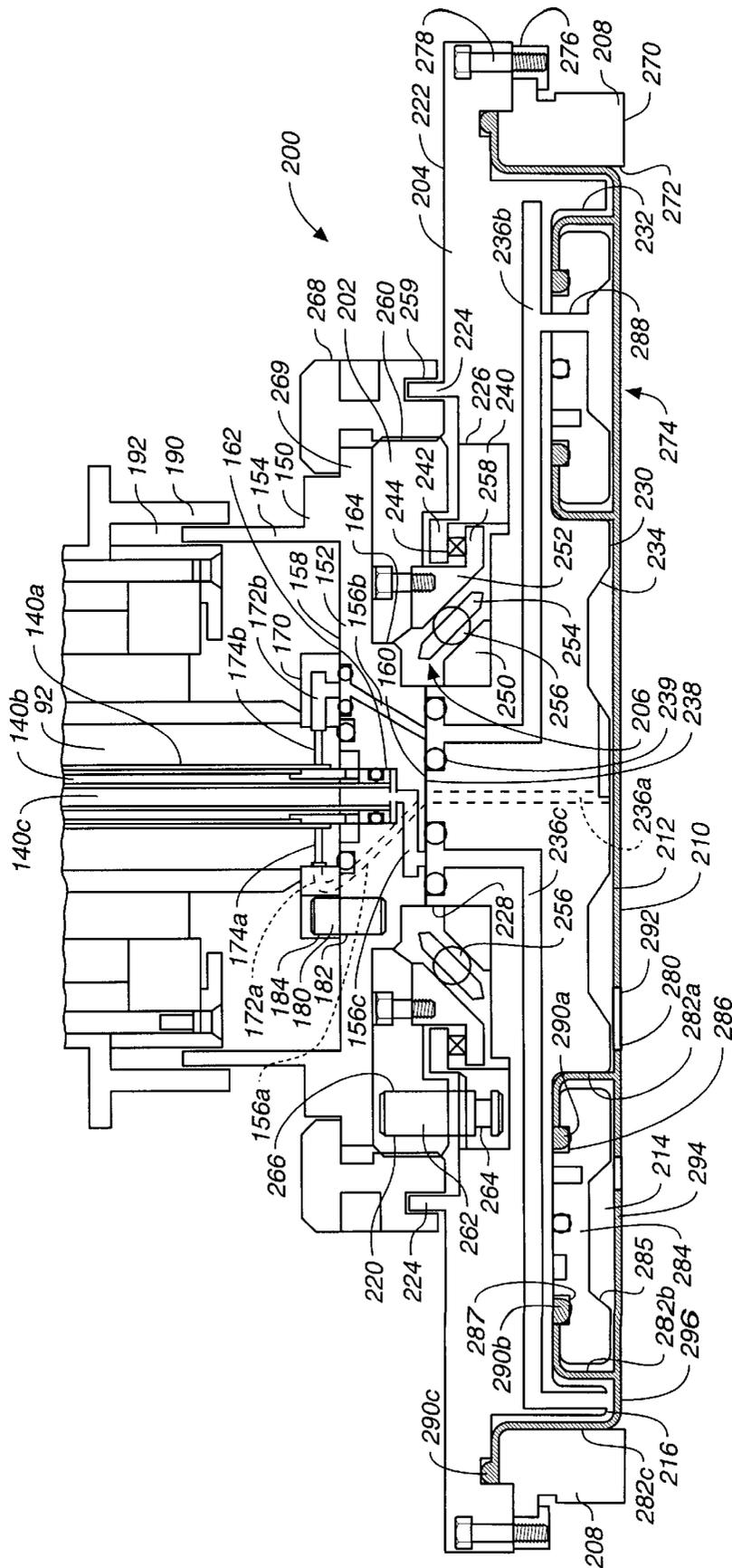


FIG.-5

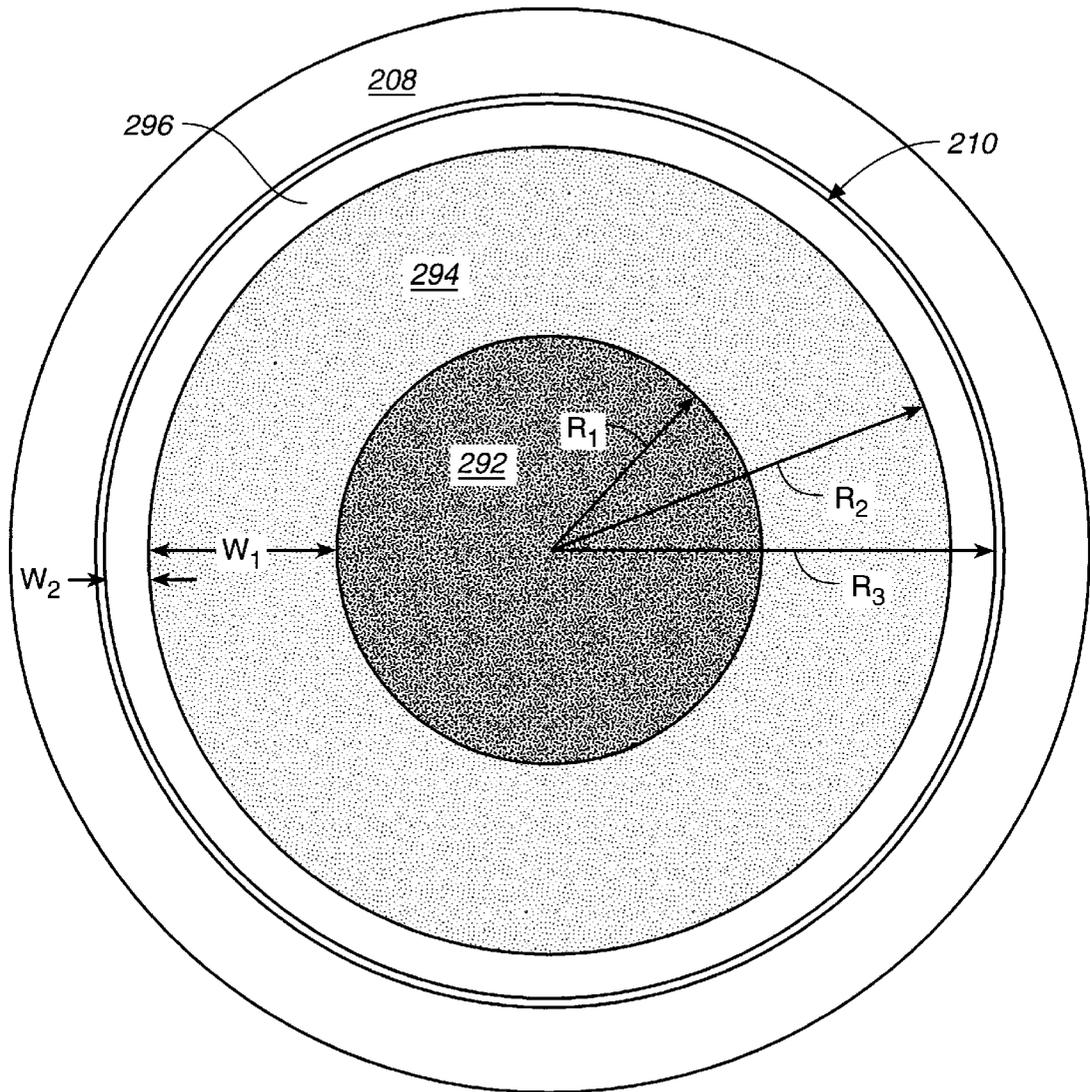


FIG._6

CARRIER HEAD WITH A FLEXIBLE MEMBRANE FOR A CHEMICAL MECHANICAL POLISHING SYSTEM

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to chemical mechanical polishing of substrates, and more particularly to a carrier head for a chemical mechanical polishing system.

Integrated circuits are typically formed on substrates, particularly silicon wafers, by the sequential deposition of conductive, semiconductive or insulative layers. After each layer is deposited, the layer is etched to create circuitry features. As a series of layers are sequentially deposited and etched, the outer or uppermost surface of the substrate, i.e., the exposed surface of the substrate, becomes increasingly non-planar. This non-planar outer surface presents a problem for the integrated circuit manufacturer. If the outer surface of the substrate is non-planar, then a photoresist layer placed thereon is also non-planar. A photoresist layer is typically patterned by a photolithographic apparatus that focuses a light image onto the photoresist. If the outer surface of the substrate is sufficiently non-planar, then the maximum height difference between the peaks and valleys of the outer surface may exceed the depth of focus of the imaging apparatus, and it will be impossible to properly focus the light image onto the outer substrate surface.

It may be prohibitively expensive to design new photolithographic devices having an improved depth of focus. In addition, as the feature size used in integrated circuits becomes smaller, shorter wavelengths of light must be used, resulting in a further reduction of the available depth of focus. Therefore, there is a need to periodically planarize the substrate surface to provide a substantially planar layer surface.

Chemical mechanical polishing (CMP) is one accepted method of planarization. This planarization method typically requires that the substrate be mounted to a carrier or polishing head. The exposed surface of the substrate is then placed against a rotating polishing pad. The carrier provides a controllable load, i.e., pressure, on the substrate to press it against the polishing pad. In addition, the carrier may rotate to provide additional motion between the substrate and polishing pad. A polishing slurry, including an abrasive and at least one chemically-reactive agent, may be distributed over the polishing pad to provide an abrasive chemical solution at the interface between the pad and substrate.

A CMP process is fairly complex, and differs from simple wet sanding. In a CMP process, the reactive agent in the slurry reacts with the outer surface of the substrate to form reactive sites. The interaction of the polishing pad and the abrasive particles with the reactive sites results in polishing.

An effective CMP process should have a high polishing rate and generate a substrate surface that is finished (lacks small-scale roughness) and flat (lacks large-scale topography). The polishing rate, finish and flatness are determined by the pad and slurry combination, the relative speed between the substrate and pad, and the force pressing the substrate against the pad. Because inadequate flatness and finish can create defective substrates, the selection of a polishing pad and slurry combination is usually dictated by the required finish and flatness. Given these constraints, the polishing rate sets the maximum throughput of the polishing apparatus.

The polishing rate depends upon the force with which the substrate is pressed against the pad. Specifically, the greater this force, the higher the polishing rate. If the carrier head

applies a non-uniform load, i.e., if the carrier head applies more force to one region of the substrate than to another, then the high pressure regions will be polished faster than the low pressure regions. Therefore, a non-uniform load may result in non-uniform polishing of the substrate.

One problem that has been encountered in CMP is that the edge of the substrate is often polished at a different rate (usually faster, but occasionally slower) than the center of the substrate. This problem, termed the "edge effect", may occur even if the load is uniformly applied to the substrate. The edge effect typically occurs in the perimeter portion, e.g., the outermost five to ten millimeters, of the substrate. The edge effect reduces the overall flatness of the substrate, makes the perimeter portion of the substrate unsuitable for use in integrated circuits, and decreases yield.

Therefore, there is a need for a CMP apparatus that optimizes polishing throughput while providing the desired flatness and finish. Specifically, the CMP apparatus should have a carrier head which provides substantially uniform polishing of a substrate.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In one aspect, the invention is directed to a carrier head for use in a chemical mechanical polishing system. The carrier head comprises a base and a flexible member connected to the base to define a first chamber, a second chamber and a third chamber. A lower surface of the flexible member provides a substrate receiving surface with an inner portion associated with the first chamber, a substantially annular middle portion surrounding the inner portion and associated with the second chamber, and a substantially annular outer portion surrounding the middle portion and associated with the third chamber. Pressures on the inner, middle and outer portions of the flexible member are independently controllable.

Implementations of the invention may include the following. The width of the outer portion may be significantly less than the width of the middle portion. The outer portion may have an outer radius approximately equal to or greater than 100 mm, such as 150 mm, and the width of the outer portion may be between about 4 and 20 mm, such as 10 mm. The flexible member may include an inner annular flap, a middle annular flap, and an outer annular flap, each flap being secured to a lower surface of the base to define the first, second and third chambers.

In another aspect, the carrier head comprises a flange attachable to a drive shaft, a base, a gimbal pivotally connecting the flange to the base, and a flexible member connected to the base and defining a chamber. A lower surface of the flexible member provides a substrate receiving surface. The gimbal includes an inner race connected to the base, an outer race connected to the flange to define a gap therebetween, and a plurality of bearings located in the gap.

Implementations of the invention may include the following. A spring may urge the inner race and outer race into contact with the bearings, and an annular retainer may hold the bearings. A plurality of pins may extend vertically through a passage in the flange portion such that an upper end of each pin is received in a recess in the drive shaft and a lower end of each pin is received in a recess in the base portion to transfer torque from the drive shaft to the base. A retaining ring may be connected to the base to define, in conjunction with the substrate receiving surface, a substrate receiving recess.

In another aspect, the invention is directed to an assembly for use in a chemical mechanical polishing system. The

assembly comprises drive shaft, a coupling slidably connected to the drive shaft, a carrier head secured to a lower end of the drive shaft to rotate with the drive shaft, a vertical actuator coupled to an upper end of the drive shaft to control the vertical position of the drive shaft and the carrier head, and a motor coupled to the coupling to rotate the coupling to transfer torque to the drive shaft.

Implementations of the invention may include the following. The drive shaft may extend through a drive shaft housing, and the vertical actuator and the motor may be secured to the drive shaft housing. The coupling may include an upper rotary ring surrounding the upper end of the drive shaft and a lower rotary ring surrounding the lower end of the drive shaft, a first bearing rotatably connecting the upper rotary ring to the drive shaft housing and a second bearing rotatably connecting the lower rotary ring to the drive shaft housing. The upper and lower rotary rings may be spline nuts and the drive shaft may be a spline shaft.

In another aspect, the invention is directed to a carrier head assembly for use in a chemical mechanical polishing system, comprising a drive shaft a first ball bearing assembly laterally securing an upper end of the drive shaft, a second ball bearing assembly laterally securing a lower end of the drive shaft, and a carrier head connected to the lower end of the drive shaft by a gimbal. The gimbal permits the carrier head to pivot with respect to the drive shaft. The distance between the first ball bearing assembly and the second ball bearing assembly is sufficient to substantially prevent lateral forces transferred through the gimbal from pivoting the drive shaft.

In another aspect, the carrier head assembly comprises a drive shaft and a carrier head connected to a lower end of the drive shaft. The drive shaft includes a bore and at least one cylindrical tube positioned in the bore to define a central passageway and at least one annular passageway surrounding the central passageway. The carrier head includes a plurality of chambers, each chamber connected to one of the passageways.

Implementations of the invention may include the following. The draft shaft may include two concentric tubes positioned in the bore to define three concentric passageways, each of the passageways connected to one of the chambers. A rotary union may couple a plurality of pressure sources to respective ones of the plurality passageways.

In another aspect, the invention is directed to a carrier head comprising first, second and third independently pressurizable chambers, a flexible inner member associated with the first chamber to apply a first pressure to a central portion of a substrate, a substantially annular flexible middle member associated with the second chamber and surrounding the inner member to apply a second pressure to a middle portion of the substrate, and a substantially annular flexible outer member associated with the third chamber and surrounding the middle member to apply a third pressure to an outer portion of the substrate. The outer member is substantially narrower than the middle member.

Advantages of the invention include the following. The carrier head applies a controllable load to different portions of the substrate to improve polishing uniformly. The carrier head is able to vacuum-chuck the substrate to lift it off the polishing pad. The carrier head contains few moving parts, and it is small and easy to service.

Other advantages and features of the present invention will become apparent from the following description, including the drawings and claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a schematic exploded perspective view of a chemical mechanical polishing apparatus.

FIG. 2A is a schematic top view of a carousel of FIG. 1, with the upper housing removed.

FIG. 2B is a schematic exploded perspective view of a portion of the carrier head assembly located above the carousel support plate.

FIG. 3 is partially a cross-sectional view of a carrier head assembly along line 3—3 of FIG. 2A, and a schematical illustration of the pumps used by the CMP apparatus.

FIG. 4 is a schematic cross-sectional view along line 4—4 of FIG. 3.

FIG. 5 is an enlarged view of the carrier head of the present invention.

FIG. 6 is a schematic bottom view of the carrier head of the present invention.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referring to FIG. 1, one or more substrates **10** will be polished by a chemical mechanical polishing (CMP) apparatus **20**. A complete description of CMP apparatus **20** may be found in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 08/549,336, by Perlov, et al., filed Oct. 27, 1996, entitled CONTINUOUS PROCESSING SYSTEM FOR CHEMICAL MECHANICAL POLISHING, and assigned to the assignee of the present invention, the entire disclosure of which is hereby incorporated by reference.

The CMP apparatus **20** includes a lower machine base **22** with a table top **23** mounted thereon and a removable upper outer cover (not shown). The table top **23** supports a series of polishing stations **25a**, **25b** and **25c**, and a transfer station **27**. The transfer station **27** forms a generally square arrangement with the three polishing stations **25a**, **25b** and **25c**. The transfer station **27** serves multiple functions of receiving the individual substrates **10** from a loading apparatus (not shown), washing the substrates, loading the substrates into carrier heads (to be described below), receiving the substrates from the carrier heads, washing the substrates again, and finally transferring the substrates back to the loading apparatus.

Each polishing station **25a–25c** includes a rotatable platen **30** on which is placed a polishing pad **32**. If the substrate **10** is an eight-inch (200 mm) diameter disk, then the platen **30** and the polishing pad **32** will be about twenty inches in diameter. The platen **30** may be a rotatable aluminum or stainless steel plate connected by a stainless steel platen drive shaft (not shown) to a platen drive motor (also not shown). For most polishing processes, the drive motor rotates the platen **30** at about thirty to two-hundred revolutions per minute, although lower or higher rotational speeds may be used.

The polishing pad **32** may be a composite material with a roughened polishing surface. The polishing pad **32** may be attached to the platen **30** by a pressure-sensitive adhesive layer. The polishing pad **32** may have a fifty mil thick hard upper layer and a fifty mil thick softer lower layer. The upper layer may be a polyurethane mixed with fillers. The lower layer may be composed of compressed felt fibers leached with urethane. A common two-layer polishing pad, with the upper layer composed of IC-1000 and the lower layer composed of SUBA-4, is available from Rodel, Inc., located in Newark, Del. (IC-1000 and SUBA-4 are product names of Rodel, Inc.).

Each polishing station 25a–25c may further include an associated pad conditioner apparatus 40. Each pad conditioner apparatus 40 has a rotatable arm 42, holding an independently rotating conditioner head 44 and an associated washing basin 46. The conditioner apparatus 40 maintains the condition of the polishing pad so that it will effectively polish any substrate pressed against it while it is rotating.

A slurry 50, containing a reactive agent (e.g., deionized water for oxide polishing), abrasive particles (e.g., silicon dioxide for oxide polishing) and a chemically-reactive catalyst (e.g., potassium hydroxide for oxide polishing), is supplied to the surface of the polishing pad 32 by a slurry supply port 52 in the center of the platen 30. Sufficient slurry is provided to cover and wet the entire polishing pad 32. Optional intermediate washing stations 55a, 55b and 55c may be positioned between the neighboring polishing stations 25a, 25b and 25c and the transfer station 27. The washing stations are provided to rinse the substrates as they pass from one polishing station to another.

A rotatable multi-head carousel 60 is positioned above the lower machine base 22. The carousel 60 is supported by a center post 62 and rotated thereon about a carousel axis 64 by a carousel motor assembly located within the base 22. The center post 62 supports a carousel support plate 66 and a cover 68. The carousel 60 includes four carrier head assemblies 70a, 70b, 70c, and 70d. Three of the carrier head assemblies receive and hold substrates, and polish them by pressing them against the polishing pad 32 on the platen 30 of the polishing stations 25a–25c. One of the carrier head assemblies receives a substrate from and delivers the substrate to the transfer station 27.

The four carrier head assemblies 70a–70d are mounted on the carousel support plate 66 at equal angular intervals about the carousel axis 64. The center post 62 allows the carousel motor to rotate the carousel support plate 66 and to orbit the carrier head systems 70a–70d, and the substrates attached thereto, about the carousel axis 64.

Each carrier head system 70a–70d includes a carrier head 200, three pneumatic actuators 74 (see FIGS. 2A and 2B), and a carrier motor 76 (shown by the removal of one-quarter of the cover 68 and the pneumatic actuators 74). Each carrier head 200 independently rotates about its own axis, and independently laterally oscillates in a radial slot 72. There are four radial slots 72 in the carousel support plate 66, generally extending radially and oriented 90° apart. Each carrier drive motor 76 is connected to a carrier drive shaft assembly 78 which extends through the radial slot 72 to the carrier head 200. There is one carrier drive shaft assembly and motor for each head.

During actual polishing, three of the carrier heads, e.g., those of carrier head assemblies 70a–70c, are positioned at and above the respective polishing stations 25a–25c. The pneumatic actuators lower the carrier head 200 and the substrate attached thereto into contact with the polishing pad 32. A slurry 50 acts as the media for chemical mechanical polishing of the substrate wafer. Generally, the carrier head 200 holds the substrate against the polishing pad and evenly distributes a downward pressure across the back surface of the substrate. The carrier head also transfers torque from the drive shaft assembly 78 to the substrate and ensures that the substrate does not slip from beneath the carrier head during polishing.

Referring to FIG. 2A, in which the cover 68 of the carousel 60 has been removed, the carousel support plate 66 supports four support slides 80. Two rails 82 fixed to the

carousel support plate 66 bracket each slot 72. Each slide 80 rides on two of the rails 82 to permit the slide 80 to move freely along the associated radial slot 72.

A bearing stop 84 anchored to the outer end of one of the rails 82 prevents the slide 80 from accidentally coming off the end of the rails. Each slide 80 contains an unillustrated threaded receiving cavity or nut fixed to the slide near its distal end. The threaded cavity or nut receives a worm-gear lead screw 86 driven by a slide radial oscillator motor 88 mounted on the carousel support plate 66. When the motor 88 turns the lead screw 86, the slide 80 moves radially. The four motors 88 are independently operable to independently move the four slides 80 along the radial slots 72.

Referring to FIGS. 2A and 2B, three pneumatic actuators 74 are mounted on each slide 80. The three pneumatic actuators 74 are connected by an arm 130 (shown in phantom in FIG. 2A) to the carrier drive shaft assembly 78. Each pneumatic actuator 74 controls the vertical position of a corner of the arm 130. The pneumatic actuators 74 are connected to a common control system and undergo identical vertical motion so that the arm 130 is maintained in a substantially horizontal position.

Referring to FIG. 3, each carrier head assembly 70a–70d includes the previously mentioned carrier head 200, pneumatic actuators 74 (only one is shown due to the cross-sectional view), carrier motor 76 and drive shaft assembly 78. The drive shaft assembly 78 includes a spline shaft 92, an upper spline nut 94, a lower spline nut 96, and an adaptor flange 150. Each carrier head assembly 70a–70d further includes a drive shaft housing 90. The carrier motor 76 may be secured to the drive shaft housing 90, and the pneumatic actuators 74 and the drive shaft housing 90 may be secured to the slide 80. Alternately, the carrier motor 76, the pneumatic actuators 74, and the drive shaft housing 90 may be secured to a carrier support plate (not shown), and the carrier support plate may be attached to the slide 80. The drive shaft housing 90 holds the upper spline nut 94 by means of a pair of upper ball bearings 100, 102. Similarly, the lower spline nut 96 is held by a pair of lower ball bearings 104, 106. The ball bearings permit the spline shaft 92, and the spline nuts 94 and 96 to rotate with respect to the drive shaft housing 90, while holding the spline nuts 96 and 94 in a vertically fixed position. A cylindrical tube 108 may be located between the ball bearings 102 and 104 to connect the upper spline nut 94 to the lower spline nut 96. The spline shaft 92 passes through the spline nuts 94 and 96 to support the carrier head 200. The spline nuts 94 and 96 hold the spline shaft 92 in a laterally fixed position, but allow the spline shaft 92 to slide vertically. The adaptor flange 150 is secured to the lower end of the spline shaft 92. The distance between the upper ball bearings 100, 102 and the lower ball bearings 104, 106 is sufficient to substantially prevent the spline shaft from pivoting under an applied side load from the carrier head. In addition, the ball bearings provide a low-friction rotary coupling. In combination, the ball bearings and the spline shaft help prevent the spline nuts from frictionally “sticking” to the drive shaft housing as a result of the side load.

Referring to FIG. 4, an outer cylindrical surface 110 of the spline shaft 92 includes three or more projections or tabs 112 which fit into corresponding recesses 116 in an inner cylindrical surface 114 of the spline nut 96. Thus, the spline shaft 92 is rotationally fixed but is free to move vertically relative to the spline nut 96. A suitable spline shaft assembly is available from THK Company, Limited, of Tokyo, Japan.

Returning to FIG. 3, a first gear 120 is connected to a portion of the upper spline nut 94 which projects above the

drive shaft housing **90**. A second gear **122** is driven by the carrier motor **76** and meshes with the first gear **120**. Thus, the carrier motor **76** may drive the second gear **122**, which drives the first gear **120**, which drives the upper spline nut **94**, which in turn drives the spline shaft **92** and the carrier head **200**. The gears **120** and **122** may be enclosed by a housing **124** to protect them from slurry or other contaminants from the chemical mechanical polishing apparatus.

The carrier motor **76** may be affixed to the drive shaft housing **90** or to the carrier support plate. The carrier motor **76** may extend through an aperture in the carousel support plate **66** (see FIG. 2B). Advantageously, in order to maximize usage of available space and reduce the size of the polishing apparatus, the carrier motor **76** is positioned adjacent to the drive shaft assembly **78** in the radial slot **72**. A splash guard **126** may be connected to the underside of the carousel support plate **66** to prevent slurry from contaminating the carrier motor **76**.

The arm **130** is connected to the spline shaft **92**. The arm **130** includes a circular aperture **136**, and the spline shaft **92** projects above the upper spline nut **94** and through the aperture **136** in the arm **130**. The arm **130** holds the spline shaft **92** with an upper ring bearing **132** and a lower ring bearing **134**. The inner races of the ring bearings **132** and **134** are secured to the spline shaft **92** and the outer races of the ring bearings are secured to the arm **130**. Thus, when the pneumatic actuators **74** lift or lower the arm **130**, the spline shaft **92** and the carrier head **200** undergo a similar motion. To load the substrate **10** against the surface of the polishing pad **32**, the pneumatic actuators **74** lower the carrier head **200** until the substrate is pressed against the polishing pad. The pneumatic actuators **74** also control the vertical position of the carrier head **200** so that it may be lifted away from the polishing pad **32** during the transfer of the substrate between the polishing stations **25a–25c** and the transfer station **27**.

The substrate is typically subjected to multiple polishing steps, including a main polishing step following a final polishing step. For the main polishing step, usually performed at station **25a**, the polishing apparatus may apply a force of approximately four to ten pounds per square inch (psi) to the substrate. At subsequent stations, the polishing apparatus may apply more or less force. For example, for a final polishing step, usually performed at station **25c**, the carrier head **200** may apply a force of about three psi. The carrier motor **76** rotates the carrier head **200** at about 30 to 200 revolutions per minute. The platen **30** and the carrier head **200** may rotate at substantially the same rate.

Referring to FIGS. 3 and 4, a bore **142** is formed through the length of the spline shaft **92**. Two cylindrical tubes **144a** and **144b** are positioned in the bore **142** to create, for example, three concentric cylindrical channels. As such, the spline shaft **92** may include, for example, an outer channel **140a**, a middle channel **140b**, and an inner channel **140c**. Various struts or cross-pieces (not shown) may be used to hold the tubes **144a** and **144b** in place inside the bore **142**. A rotary coupling **146** at the top of the spline shaft **92** couples three fluid lines **148a**, **148b** and **148c** to the three channels **140a**, **140b** and **140c**, respectively. Three pumps **149a**, **149b** and **149c** may be connected to the fluid lines **140a**, **140b** and **140c**, respectively. Channels **140a–140c** and pumps **149a–149c** are used, as described in more detail below, to pneumatically power the carrier head **200** and to vacuum chuck the substrate to the bottom of the carrier head **200**.

Referring to FIG. 5, the adaptor flange **150** is detachably connected to the bottom of the spline shaft **92**. The adaptor

flange **150** is a generally bowl-shaped body having a base **152** and a circular wall **154**. Three passages **156a–156c** (passage **156a** is shown in phantom in this cross-sectional view) extend from an upper surface **158** to a lower surface **160** of the base **152** of the adaptor flange **150**. The upper surface **158** of the base **152** may include a circular depression **162** and its lower surface **160** may include a lower hub portion **164**. The lowermost end of the spline shaft **92** fits into the circular depression **162**.

A generally annular connector flange **170** may be joined to the lower portion of the spline shaft **92**. The connector flange **170** includes two passages **172a** and **172b** (passage **172b** is shown in phantom in this cross-sectional view). Two horizontal passages **174a** and **174b** extend through the spline shaft **92** to connect the channels **140a** and **140b** to the passages **172a** and **172b**.

To connect the adaptor flange **150** to the spline shaft **92**, three dowel pins **180** (only one is shown due to the cross-sectional view) are placed into matching recesses **182** in the upper surface **158** of the adaptor flange **150**. Then the adaptor flange **150** is lifted so that the dowel pins **180** fit into matching receiving recesses **184** in the connector flange **170**. This circumferentially aligns passages **172a** and **172b** with passages **156a** and **156b**, respectively, and aligns channel **140c** with passage **156c**. The adaptor flange **150** may then be secured to the connector flange **170** with screws (not shown).

The circular wall **154** of adaptor flange **150** prevents slurry from contacting the spline shaft **92**. A flange **190** may be connected to the drive shaft housing **90** and the circular wall **154** may project into a gap **192** between the flange **190** and the drive shaft housing **90**.

The carrier head **200** includes a housing flange **202**, a carrier base **204**, a gimbal mechanism **206**, a retaining ring **208**, and a flexible membrane **210**. The housing flange **202** is connected to the adaptor flange **150** at the bottom of the drive shaft assembly **72**. The carrier base **204** is pivotally connected to the housing flange **202** by the gimbal mechanism **206**. The carrier base **204** is also connected to the adaptor flange **150** to rotate therewith about an axis of rotation which is substantially perpendicular to the surface of the polishing pad **32**. The flexible membrane **210** is connected to the carrier base **204** and defines three chambers, including a circular central chamber **212**, an annular middle chamber **214** surrounding the central chamber **212**, and an annular outer chamber **216** surrounding the annular middle chamber **214**. Pressurization of the chambers **212**, **214** and **216** controls the downward pressure of the substrate against the polishing pad **32**. Each of these elements will be explained in greater detail below.

The housing flange **202** is generally annular in shape and may have approximately the same diameter as the adaptor flange **150**. The housing flange **202** includes three vertical passages **220** (only one of which is shown due to the cross-sectional view) formed at equal angular intervals around the axis of rotation of the carrier head **200**. The housing flange **202** may have a threaded cylindrical neck **260**.

The carrier base **204** is a generally disc-shaped body located beneath the housing flange **202**. The diameter of the carrier base **204** is somewhat larger than the diameter of the substrate to be polished. A top surface **222** of the carrier base **204** includes an annular rim **224**, an annular recess **226**, and a turret **228** located in the center on the recess **226**. A bottom surface **230** of the carrier base **204** includes an annular outer depression **232** which will define the edges of the middle

chamber 214. The bottom surface 230 of the carrier base 204 also includes a shallower, annular inner depression 234 which will define a ceiling of the inner chamber 212.

The carrier base 204 also includes three passageways 236a-236c (passage 236a is shown in phantom in this cross-sectional view) which extend from an upper surface 238 of the turret 228 to the lower surface 230. O-rings 239 are placed into recesses in the upper surface 238 and surround the three passageways 236a-236c to seal the passageways when the carrier head 200 is connected to the adaptor flange 150.

As previously mentioned, the carrier base 204 is connected to the housing flange 202 by the gimbal mechanism 206. The gimbal mechanism 206 permits the carrier base 204 to pivot with respect to the housing flange 202 so that the carrier base 204 can remain substantially parallel to the surface of the polishing pad. Specifically, the gimbal mechanism permits the carrier base 204 to rotate about a point on the interface between the polishing pad 32 and the substrate 10. However, the gimbal mechanism 206 holds the carrier base 204 beneath the spline shaft 92 to prevent the carrier base 204 from moving laterally, i.e., parallel to the surface of the polishing pad 32. The gimbal mechanism 206 also transfers the downward pressure from the spline shaft 92 to the carrier base 204. Furthermore, the gimbal mechanism 206 can transfer any side load, such as the shear force created by the friction between the substrate and the polishing pad 32, to the housing flange 202 and drive shaft assembly 78.

An annular biasing flange 240 with an inwardly projecting lip 242 is fixed to the carrier base 204. The biasing flange 240 may be bolted to the carrier base 204 in the annular recess 226.

The gimbal mechanism 206 includes an inner race 250, an outer race 252, a retainer 254, and multiple ball bearings 256. There may be twelve ball bearings 256, although only two are shown in this cross-sectional view. The inner race 250 is secured to or formed as part of the carrier base 204 and is located in the recess 226 adjacent the turret 228. The outer race 252 is secured to or formed as part of the housing flange 202 and includes an outwardly projecting lip 258 which extends beneath the inwardly projecting lip 242 of the biasing flange 240. An annular spring washer 244 fits in the gap between the inwardly projecting lip 242 and the outwardly projecting lip 258. The washer 244 biases the inner race 250 and outer race 252 into contact with the ball bearings 256. The retainer 254 is a generally annular-shaped body having a plurality of circular apertures. The ball bearings 256 fit into the apertures in the retainer 254 to be held in place in the gap between the inner race 250 and the outer race 252.

To connect the carrier head 200 to the adaptor flange 150, three vertical torque transfer pins 262 (only one of which is shown in this cross-sectional view) are inserted through the passages 220 in the housing flange 202 and into three receiving recesses 264 in the carrier base 204 or the biasing flange 240. Then the carrier head 200 is lifted so that the vertical torque transfer pins 262 are fitted into three receiving recesses 266 in the adaptor flange 150. This aligns the passages 156a-156c in the adaptor flange 150 with the passageways 236a-236c, respectively, in the carrier base 204. A lower hub 178 of the adaptor flange 150 contacts the upper surface 239 of the turret 228. Finally, a threaded perimeter nut 268 can fit over an edge 269 of the adaptor flange 150 and be screwed onto the threaded neck 260 of the housing flange 202 to firmly secure the carrier head 200 to

the adaptor flange 150 and thus to the drive shaft assembly 78. The rim 224 of the carrier base 204 may fit into an annular recess 259 in the lower surface of the perimeter nut 268. This creates a restricted pathway that prevents slurry from contaminating the gimbal mechanism 206 or the spring washer 244.

The retaining ring 208 may be secured at the outer edge of the carrier base 204. The retaining ring 208 is a generally annular ring having a substantially flat bottom surface 270. When the pneumatic actuators 74 lower the carrier head 200, the retaining ring 208 contacts the polishing pad 32. An inner surface 272 of the retaining ring 208 defines, in conjunction with the bottom surface of the flexible membrane 210, a substrate receiving recess 274. The retaining ring 208 prevents the substrate from escaping the substrate receiving recess 274 and transfers the lateral load from the substrate to the carrier base 204.

The retaining ring 208 may be made of a hard plastic or ceramic material. The retaining ring 208 may be secured to the carrier base 204 by, for example, a retaining piece 276 which is secured, for example, to the carrier base 204 by bolts 278.

The flexible membrane 210 is connected to and extends beneath the carrier base 204. The bottom surface of the flexible membrane 210 provides a substrate receiving surface 280. In conjunction with the base 204, the flexible membrane 210 defines the central chamber 212, the annular middle chamber 214, and the annular outer chamber 216. The flexible membrane 210 is a generally circular sheet formed of a flexible and elastic material, such as a high strength silicone rubber. The substrate backing membrane 210 includes an inner annular flap 282a, a middle annular flap 282b, and an outer annular flap 282c. The flaps 282a-282c are generally concentric. The flaps 282a-282c may be formed by stacking three separate flexible membranes and bonding the central portions of the membranes so as to leave the outer annular portions of each membrane free. Alternatively, the entire flexible membrane 210 may be extruded as a single part.

An annular lower flange 284 may be secured in a depression 232 on the bottom surface 230 of the carrier base 204. The lower flange 284 includes an inner annular groove 286 and an outer annular groove 287 on its upper surface. A passage 288 may extend through the lower flange 284 and connect to passageway 236b. The lower flange 284 may also include an annular indentation 289 on its lower surface. The inner flap 282a, the middle flap 282b, and the outer flap 282c may each include a protruding outer edge 290a, 290b and 290c, respectively. To secure the flexible membrane 210 to the carrier base 204, the inner flap 282a is wrapped around the inner edge of the lower flange 284 so that its protruding edge 290a fits into the inner groove 286, and the middle flap 282b is wrapped around the outer edge of the lower flange 284 so that its protruding edge 290b fits into the outer groove 287. Then the lower flange 284 is secured in depression 232 by screws (not shown) which may extend from the top surface 222 of the carrier base 204. The inner and middle flaps 282a and 282b are thus clamped between the lower flange 284 and the carrier base 204 to seal the inner and middle chambers 212 and 214. Finally, the outer edge of 290c of outer flap 282c is clamped between the retaining ring 208 and the carrier base 204 to seal the outer chamber 216.

Pump 149a (see FIG. 3) may be connected to the inner chamber 212 by the fluid line 148a, the rotary coupling 146, the inner channel 140a in the spline shaft 92, the passage

(not shown) in the adaptor flange **150**, and the passageway **236c** (not shown) through the carrier base **204**. Pump **149b** may be connected to the middle chamber **214** by the fluid line **148b**, the rotary coupling **146**, the middle channel **140b**, the passage (not shown) in the adaptor flange **150**, the passageway **236b** in the carrier base **204**, and the passage **288** in the lower flange **284**. Pump **149c** may be connected to the outer chamber **216** by the fluid line **148c**, the rotary coupling **146**, the outer channel **140c**, the passage **156c** in the adaptor flange **150**, and the passageway **236c** in the carrier base **204**. If a pump forces a fluid, preferably a gas such as air, into one of the chambers, then the volume of that chamber will increase and a portion of the flexible membrane **210** will be forced downwardly or outwardly. On the other hand, if the pump evacuates a fluid from the chamber, then the volume of the chamber will decrease and a portion of the flexible membrane will be drawn upwardly or inwardly.

The flexible membrane **210** may include a circular inner portion **292**, an annular middle portion **294**, and an annular outer portion **296** located beneath the inner chamber **212**, middle chamber **214**, and outer chamber **216**, respectively (see also FIG. 6). As such, the pressures in chambers **212**, **214** and **216** can control the downward pressure applied by the respective flexible membrane portions **292**, **294** and **296**.

The flexible membrane portions may have different dimensions. The majority of the edge effect occurs at the outer-most six to eight millimeters of the substrate. Therefore, the annular outer membrane portion **296** may be fairly narrow in the radial direction in comparison to the annular middle membrane portion **294** in order to provide pressure control of a narrow edge region at the edge of the substrate which is independent of the pressures applied to the center and middle portions of the substrate.

Referring to FIG. 6, the inner membrane portion **292** may have a radius R_1 , the middle membrane portion **294** may have an outer radius R_2 , and the outer membrane portion **296** may have an outer radius R_3 . The width W_1 of the middle membrane portion **294** may be equal to $R_2 - R_1$, and width W_2 of the outer membrane portion **296** may be equal to $R_3 - R_2$. The radius R_3 may be equal to or greater than about 100 mm (for a 200 mm diameter substrate), and the width W_2 may be between five and thirty millimeters. If the radius R_3 is 5.875 inches (for a 300 mm diameter substrate), the widths W_1 and W_2 may be 2.375 inches and 0.625 inches, respectively. In this configuration, the radii R_1 and R_2 are 2.875 and 5.25 inches, respectively.

The pressures in chambers **212**, **214** and **216** may be independently controlled by pumps **149a**, **149b** and **149c** to maximize the uniformity of polishing of the substrate **10**. The average pressure in outer chamber **216** may be lower than the average pressure in the other two chambers so that the pressure on the outer annular membrane portion **296** is lower than the pressure on the inner membrane portion **292** or the middle membrane portion **294** during polishing so as to compensate for the over-polishing created by the edge effect.

The flexible membrane **210** deforms to match the backside of the substrate **10**. For example, if the substrate is warped, the flexible membrane **210**, will in effect, conform to the contours of the warped substrate. Thus, the load on the substrate should remain uniform even if there are surface irregularities on the back side of the substrate.

Rather than applying a different pressure to each chamber, the time during which a positive pressure is applied to each chamber may be varied. In this fashion, uniform polishing

may be achieved. For example, rather than apply a pressure of 8.0 psi to the inner chamber **212** and the middle chamber **214** and a pressure of 6.0 psi to the outer chamber **216**, a pressure of 8.0 psi may be applied to the inner chamber **212** and the middle chamber **214** for one minute while the same pressure is applied to the outer chamber **216** for forty-five seconds. This technique permits pressure sensors and pressure regulators to be replaced by simple software timing controls. In addition, the technique may allow for a more accurate process characterization and consequently better uniformity in polishing the substrate.

The carrier head **200** can vacuum-chuck the substrate **10** to the underside of the flexible membrane **210**. As such, the pressure in the middle chamber **214** is reduced as compared to the pressure in the other chambers and this causes the middle membrane portion **294** of the flexible membrane **210** to bow inwardly. The upward deflection of the middle membrane portion **294** creates a low pressure pocket between the flexible membrane **210** and the substrate **10**. This low pressure pocket will vacuum-chuck the substrate **10** to the carrier head. It is advantageous to use the middle membrane portion **294** as opposed to the inner membrane portion **292** in order to avoid bowing the center of the substrate, which can create a low pressure pocket between the substrate and the polishing pad. Such a low pressure pocket would tend to vacuum-chuck the substrate to the polishing pad. In addition, the pressure in the outer chamber **216** may be increased while the pressure in the middle chamber **214** is reduced. An increased pressure in the outer chamber **216** forces the outer membrane portion **296** against the substrate **10** to effectively form a fluid-tight seal. This seal can prevent ambient air from entering the vacuum between the middle membrane portion **294** and the substrate. The outer chamber **216** may be pressurized for only a short period of time, for example, less than a second, while the vacuum pocket is being created, as this appears to provide the most reliable vacuum-chucking procedure.

The polishing apparatus **20** may operate as follows. The substrate **10** is loaded into the substrate receiving recess **274** with the backside of the substrate abutting the flexible membrane **210**. The pump **149a** pumps fluid into the outer chamber **216**. This causes the outer membrane portion **296** to form a fluid-tight seal at the edge of the substrate **10**. Simultaneously, pump **149b** pumps fluid out of the middle chamber **214** to create a low pressure pocket between the flexible membrane **210** and the backside of the substrate **10**. The outer chamber **216** is then quickly returned to normal atmospheric pressure. Finally, the pneumatic actuators **74** lift the carrier head **200** off of the polishing pad **32** or out of the transfer station **27**. The carousel **60** rotates the carrier head **200** to a new polishing station. The pneumatic actuators **74** then lower the carrier head **200** until the substrate **10** contacts the polishing pad **32**. Finally, the pumps **149a-9c** force fluid into the chambers **212**, **214** and **216** to apply a downward load to the substrate **10** for polishing.

The present invention is described in terms of the preferred embodiment. The invention, however, is not limited to the embodiments depicted and described herein. Rather, the scope of the invention is defined by the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A carrier head for use in a chemical mechanical polishing system, comprising:

a base; and

a flexible member connected to the base to define a first chamber, a second chamber and a third chamber, a lower surface of the flexible member providing a

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substrate receiving surface with an inner portion associated with the first chamber, a substantially annular middle portion surrounding the inner portion and associated with the second chamber, and a substantially annular outer portion surrounding the middle portion and associated with the third chamber, such that pressures on each of the inner, middle and outer portions of the flexible member are independently controllable.

2. The carrier head of claim 1 wherein a width of the outer portion is significantly less than a width of the middle portion.

3. The carrier head of claim 2 wherein the outer portion has an outer radius approximately equal to or greater than 100 millimeters and the width of the outer portion is between about 4 and 20 millimeters.

4. The carrier head of claim 3 wherein the width of the outer portion of the flexible member is about 10 millimeters.

5. The carrier head of claim 1 wherein the flexible member includes an inner annular flap, a middle annular flap, and an outer annular flap, each flap being secured to a lower surface of the base to define the first, second and third chambers.

6. The carrier head of claim 1, further comprising:

a flange attachable to a drive shaft; and

a gimbal pivotally connecting the flange to the base, the gimbal including an inner race connected to the base, an outer race connected to the flange to define a gap therebetween, and a plurality of bearings located in the gap.

7. The carrier head of claim 6 further comprising a spring to urge the inner race and outer race into contact with the bearings.

8. The carrier head of claim 6 further comprising an annular retainer to hold the bearings.

9. The carrier head of claim 6 further comprising a plurality of pins connecting the drive shaft to the base to transfer torque from the drive shaft to the base.

10. The carrier head of claim 9 wherein each pin extends vertically through a passage in the flange such that an upper end of each pin is received in a recess in the drive shaft and a lower end of each pin is received in a recess in the base.

11. The carrier head of claim 6 further comprising a retaining ring connected to the base to define, in conjunction with the flexible membrane, a substrate receiving recess.

12. A carrier head for use in a chemical mechanical polishing system, comprising:

a base;

a flexible inner member positioned below the base and associated with a first chamber to apply a first pressure to a central portion of a substrate;

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a substantially annular flexible middle member positioned below the base and associated with a second chamber and surrounding the inner member to apply a second pressure to a middle portion of the substrate; and

a substantially annular flexible outer member positioned below the base and associated with a third chamber and surrounding the middle member to apply a third pressure to an outer portion of the substrate, wherein the outer member is substantially narrower than the middle member, and wherein the first, second and third chambers are independently pressurizable so that pressures on each of the inner, middle and outer members are independently controllable.

13. The carrier head of claim 12 wherein the inner member, the middle member, and the outer member are portions of a flexible membrane.

14. The carrier head of claim 13 wherein the flexible membrane includes an inner annular flap, a middle annular flap, and an outer annular flap, each flap being secured to a lower surface of the base to define the first, second and third chambers.

15. The carrier head of claim 14 wherein the outer member has an outer radius approximately equal to or greater than 100 millimeters and the width of the outer member is between about 4 and 20 millimeters.

16. The carrier head of claim 15 wherein the width of the outer member is about 10 millimeters.

17. A method of chemical mechanical polishing, comprising:

loading a substrate in a carrier head;

pressurizing a first chamber in the carrier head to apply a first pressure to a central portion of the substrate through a flexible inner member associated with the first chamber;

pressurizing a second chamber in the carrier head to apply a second pressure to a middle portion of the substrate through a flexible middle member associated with the second chamber; and

pressurizing a third chamber in the carrier head to apply a third pressure to an outer portion of the substrate through a flexible outer member associated with the outer chamber, wherein the outer member is substantially narrower than the middle member.

18. The method of claim 17 wherein the inner member, the middle member, and the outer member are portions of a flexible membrane.

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